

Exhibit 7

Declaration of Eric Rassbach

UCLA faces scrutiny for safety issues at protests for Israel, Palestine

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The office of UCLA Student Affairs is pictured. Student Affairs has faced scrutiny recently after complaints about policing at recent protests and rallies. (Mia Tavares/Daily Bruin senior staff)



By Dylan Winward

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Organizers of and participants in recent protests on campus related to the ongoing Israel-Hamas war said UCLA's approach to policing these protests has been imbalanced and insufficient.

Since an Oct. 7 attack by militant group and Palestinian political party Hamas on Israeli villages, as well as Israeli invasions and bombings that have followed in response, multiple organizations on campus – including Bruins for Israel and Students for Justice in Palestine at UCLA – have held rallies in support of Israel or Palestine. However, allegations of physical and verbal harassment perpetrated by both attendees and security have followed, leading some community members to question UCLA's handling of safety at these events.

Though UCLA Media Relations declined a request for an interview with UCLA Student Affairs, citing a lack of availability, UCLA spokesperson Ricardo Vazquez said in an emailed statement that the office of Student Organizations, Leadership & Engagement attempts to meet with UCLA organizations planning protests and rallies to advise them on event logistics.

“When events are pre-planned, there is a conversation between the organizations and their SOLE advisor regarding the reason for the event, what outcome the student group is looking for as well as scheduling, safety and security,” he said in the statement. “If a protest or action is unscheduled, Student Affairs staff tries to make contact with an organizer to determine their goals and whether a march is to take place.”

However, Mohammad, a media representative for SJP at UCLA who was granted partial anonymity because of safety concerns, said that though his organization has tried to engage with university administration ahead of its protests, its liaison officer has been slow in responding to its communications, sometimes taking up to a week to reply.

Mohammad added that he thinks the slow response times from the university demonstrate that the administration does not care about activism supporting Palestine.

The recent protests have also led to accusations of hate speech and harassment.

After a protest held in support of Israel on Nov. 7, the Undergraduate Students Association Council's Cultural Affairs Commission – which has previously expressed support for Palestine and condemned the United States' and UC's financial and military support of Israel – alleged in an Instagram post that protesters harassed, threatened and assaulted students who showed support for Palestine on the same day as the rally.

The commission also said in the post that some of its staff members, who are Black students and students of color, were threatened and verbally harassed after the rally.

The CAC office did not respond to requests for comment.

Additionally, at recent protests in support of Palestine, protesters have chanted phrases such as “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free,” and “Resistance is justified when people are occupied.” Some members of the campus community said they were concerned that the chants were antisemitic.

However, Vazquez said in the statement that the university does not restrict or control the views shared by student groups.

Some activists have also accused the university of taking an imbalanced approach to policing protests.

Mohammad said he thought members of university security who were present at a teach-in about Palestine failed to protect the safety of students. In an Instagram post, SJP at UCLA alleged that individuals at the event shouted death threats at students attending the teach-in and threw their laptops in the trash.

Mohammad added that he felt UCPD has also targeted protestors supporting Palestine in some instances.

“The police are always accelerating and agitating the aggression in exchanges with people who are pro-Palestinian and people who are demonstrating for the sake of Palestine,” he said.

Vazquez said in the statement that administration approaches to policing are decided on a content-neutral basis.

He added that the university is increasing safety precautions, such as through additional patrols by UCPD, to protect students on campus, following recent concerns of antisemitism and Islamophobia. In a recent Instagram story, Chabad at UCLA alleged that individuals supporting Palestine on campus have carried large knives while on campus and asked what UCLA was doing to protect Jewish students.

However, Mohammad said it has been difficult to see an increased police presence on campus because of police officers’ historical mistreatment of racial minority groups in the U.S.

“Palestinian students out here, or people who are just minorities, have experienced racial profiling,” he said. “We experienced the position of not being able to trust the police.”

UCLA has also been sending monitors from Student Affairs to recent protests and rallies, Vazquez said in the statement. However, he did not elaborate on what training they received, except to say they were told to be “calm, rational, empathetic and professional.”

“At on-campus events, UCPD and Student Affairs Monitors — who are trained on de-escalation techniques, and who understand campus policies and operations — are present to defuse possible tensions while protecting participants’ right to speak,” he said in the statement.

Events held by non-university groups must be booked through the UCLA Events Office, which has the right to dictate the timing, location and manner of the protest, Vazquez added in the statement. One recent protest in support of Israel on Oct. 30 was not hosted by organizations affiliated with the university.

Rachel Burnett, a fourth-year Middle Eastern studies and psychology student who helped organize a vigil for Israel and Palestine, said it has been difficult being on campus at such a tense and polarizing time. She added that she believes some people on campus have defended the Oct. 7 Hamas attack, a narrative which she finds upsetting.

“I think it’s good in some respects that we have people who don’t agree with everything I say – I think that creates healthy conversation,” Burnett said. “But at the same time, there are some ideas that have been shared for sure that have for me just been so beyond the pale, and it’s not pleasant.”

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